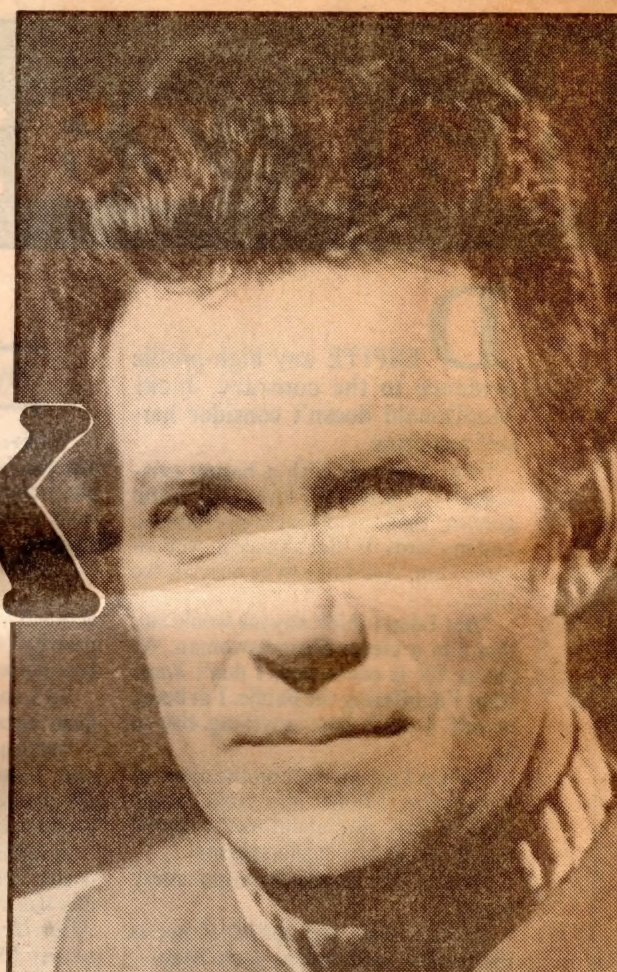


The Great Weekend



NIMOY . . . redefining Captain Spock.

THE TREK HOME



SHATNER . . . police show orientated.

— a cult comes back to earth

TWENTY years after it made an uncertain debut on US television, there seems no way of curbing the enormous popularity of *Star Trek*.

Thousands of so-called "Trekkies" still gather regularly throughout the world for *Star Trek* conventions; the original episodes of the TV series still top the ratings over here; and, in the latest development, Paramount has announced plans for a new series.

But all this pales against the astonishing success of the *Star Trek* movies which have a habit of breaking box office records.

The first, back in 1979, took \$17 million in its first week of US release; the third took about the same in just three days; and so on.

There also seems little doubt that the latest film *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, currently playing in Brisbane, will outdo the other three.

This is largely because *Star Trek IV* really does aim to boldly go — perhaps the most notable split infinitive of the past two decades — where no *Star Trek* movie has gone before.

Leonard Nimoy, who once again doubles as Captain Spock and the film's director, as he did on *Star Trek III*, has infused the latest instalment with real comedy.

Not only that, in *The Voyage Home*, Spock, Captain Kirk and crew are sent back in time from the 23rd century to San Francisco, 1986 in a bid to save their world.

Thus, in the style of Paul Hogan's *Crocodile Dundee*, *Star Trek IV* be-

BRUCE GUTHRIE in Los Angeles talks to Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner about the latest *Star Trek* movie.

comes a fish out of water story. Although in our exclusive interview Leonard Nimoy wished to make it clear he didn't get the idea from the Hogan film.

"We actually used the time travel thing in an episode of the *Star Trek* TV series called *City on the Edge of Forever*," Nimoy said.

"More than anything I wanted to get some comedy into this film and I thought that would help.

"In the first *Star Trek* film there was no comedy. The second had only a little and in the third there was a lot of killing and death going on. I just felt it was time to lighten up."

Nimoy says "fish out of water" stories are nothing new and cites Eddie Murphy's *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Trading Places*. The trend would doubtless continue, he said, but in time would run its course.

"The clever thing about *Crocodile Dundee* is that there is a fish out of water story on both sides of the coin. She is out of water in Australia and he is out of water in New York," Nimoy said.

In *Star Trek IV* an alien probe visits Earth in the 23rd century in an effort to make contact with humpback whales, extinct since late in the 20th century.

The presence of the probe has a catastrophic effect on Earth and so Kirk and his crew head back in time to find a couple of whales so the probe can make contact and go back from whence it came, leaving Earth in relative peace.

"I thought it would be a good device to have Earth confronting a problem whose solution was in the past," Nimoy said.

"Then I read a book called *Biophelia* which made the point that by the 1990s the world would be losing 10,000 species per year — about one species an hour.

"The next step was to decide which species I would use in the film. I thought of a plant which might be needed to provide the cure for some deadly disease that had attacked Earth in the 23rd century.

"But that would mean more death and dying, so I dropped that idea, it wouldn't have been too exciting transporting a plant through time.

"Then I had a gathering at my house and one of the people there started talking about humpbacks and their amazing song sounds. I'd found my species.

"I thought if we could somehow pull off taking two humpbacks through time, we'd have some film."

Nimoy has been playing the half-Vulcan, half-human, Captain Spock on and off since late 1964.

That was when *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry, a former LA policeman, filmed a pilot for the NBC television network. Entitled *The Cage*, it featured the late Jeffrey Hunter as Captain Christopher Pike and Nimoy as Spock.

NBC ultimately rejected the pilot as "too cerebral" but urged Roddenberry to try again. When Hunter was unavailable for the second pilot, young Canadian ac-

tor William Shatner was hired to play Captain James T. Kirk.

The second attempt was called *Where No Man Has Gone Before* and was filmed in the northern summer of 1965. NBC approved it six months later in February of 1966 and work began on the weekly TV series soon after.

At 8.30 p.m. on Thursday, September 8, 1966, the first episode of *Star Trek* aired on US television, but it was anything but an instant success.

For one thing, according to a recent interview with Roddenberry, Paramount officials didn't like "the funny-looking guy with the pointy ears". And its ratings, while eminently respectable, were well short of what was needed to win the time slot.

The original *Star Trek* was only on US television for three years and each year NBC decided to cancel it. The first two times they re-thought this after spirited letter-writing campaigns by "Trekkies". By the end of 1969 however their faith and patience had worn out.

Ironically, the series really found fame in the 70s when the 70 or so original episodes went into what's known here as syndication and started popping up on smaller, independent stations as repeats.

Even today, according to the latest ratings surveys, the *Star Trek* series is ranked as the number one "off-network" hour on American television.

By the late 70s, following the enormous success of *Star Wars*, Paramount regrouped the crew of Starship Enterprise and made the first *Star Trek* movie.

Both Nimoy and co-star Shatner, who

are both 55, — "although Bill's four decades older" — are often asked what makes *Star Trek* so popular.

"Apart from anything else the fact that it is set in the 23rd century is significant," Nimoy says. "It suggests we are going to make it that far and that means a lot to me.

"This is very hopeful science fiction. It is not just people shooting at one another. I hate doomsday science fiction, it really makes my skin crawl."

What also makes *Star Trek IV* more watchable than its predecessors is Nimoy's redefining of Spock.

In *Star Trek II*, Spock is killed. In *Star Trek III* he is resurrected.

"But we never really know by the end of *III* whether he has all his grey matter back," Nimoy says. "This film allows me to redefine Spock to some extent and I particularly enjoyed that."

Audiences will see a less logical, more human version of Spock in *Star Trek IV*. What is also notable about the film is its complete lack of violence.

"Nobody hits anybody and nobody shoots anybody. That was entirely intentional," Nimoy said.

Shatner, who has already been contracted to direct *Star Trek V*, said in a separate interview that wouldn't necessarily be his approach on the next instalment.

"I am police show orientated," he said. Shatner's other TV series was the police drama *T.J. Hooker*.

"A good sock on the jaw is fine with me providing it's the good guy socking the bad guy," Shatner said.